

• Get The Customer Service Message Out

Problem: In an organization as large as the IRS, it takes much too long for front-line employees to learn about new procedures, changing operations and goals.

Actions:

Start Right Away: Before the end of the 1998 filing season, the IRS should have an intensive, organization-wide special training program to introduce employees to the new approach to customer service (HP15.1).

To further support the new emphasis on customer service, the IRS should:

- develop an annual IRS-wide customer service orientation for all employees (HP15.2);
- create a customer service brochure to highlight and communicate the customer service expectations of IRS employees (HP15.3);
- centralize oversight and responsibility for major communication initiatives (CM05.1); and
- give the course entitled “Leading Empowered Workgroups” to all managers and employees (HP11.5, HP11.6).

Use Every Means to Get the Message Out: The IRS should use the new tools of electronic communication, including the Voice Messaging System, IRS Intranet, bulletin boards, interactive video teleconferencing, as well as paper communications, to deliver quarterly reports on IRS performance to all employees (HP13.2). It should also use the Intranet to reinforce a consistent customer service message (HP15.4), and use Intranet and other technology to improve the distribution of information that employees need to keep up with changes that affect customers, such as changes in tax laws and procedures (CM05.2).

IV. Conclusion

On May 20, 1997, Vice President Gore and Treasury Secretary Rubin set forth a broad challenge to the IRS: to dramatically improve the way it serves its customers — the American taxpayers. The Customer Service Task Force spent five months interviewing customers, analyzing data, and evaluating best practices in an effort to meet that challenge.

The IRS has already begun to build a new relationship with its customers. On Saturday November 15, it held the first of monthly “Problem Solving Days,” where customers met face-to-face with IRS officials to solve their tax problems. Approximately 6,300 taxpayers attended the first Problem Solving Day, and 75 percent of respondents to the day’s satisfaction survey gave the IRS the highest rating for overall service.

The IRS has also already stopped ranking district offices based on revenue measures and has implemented an interim procedure to ensure that the seizures of taxpayer property are made only when appropriate. These and other recent activities demonstrate the IRS’s commitment to rebuild the trust of the American people. It may be impossible to hope that the public will ever love the tax collector, but in time they may agree that the IRS does a difficult job fairly, respectfully, and courteously.

This report covers a wide variety of issues, ranging from

telephone service to notices to electronic filing. It also addresses the needs of a variety of customers, including individuals and small businesses. The changes it recommends will not occur overnight, for many of them require new computer systems, legislative changes, or a substantial transformation in the way the organization thinks and operates. The speed with which the recommendations can be implemented also depends significantly upon the availability of resources and the support of both IRS management and front-line IRS employees. Regardless of the pace of implementation, however, the recommendations represent a new way for the IRS to do business. The Customer Service Task Force report helps pave the way for creating an IRS that the American public deserves.